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Chairperson: Ms. Intelmann ..... (Estonia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 51: Macroeconomic policy questions (*continued*)

(b) International financial system and development (*continued*) (A/C.2/61/L.3)

Draft resolution on the international financial system and development

1. **Mr. Le Roux** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution A/C.2/61/L.3. The Group regarded the resolution as very important because the General Assembly was the only international body in which developing countries enjoyed equal voice and participation on issues relating to the international financial system. Many of the paragraphs in the draft were agreed paragraphs from the resolution adopted at the Assembly's sixtieth session. It was very important that those paragraphs remain, as inadequate progress had been made on the issues concerned. The draft resolution had also been updated to take account of the outcomes of the spring 2006 meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO meeting held recently in Singapore, as well as the provisions of General Assembly resolution 60/265 on follow-up to the development outcome of the 2005 World Summit.

(d) Commodities (*continued*) (A/C.2/61/L.2)

Draft resolution on the International Year of Natural Fibres

2. **Mr. Le Roux** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution A/C.2/61/L.2, which had been mandated by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In the draft, Member States requested that the General Assembly should declare the year 2009 as the International Year of Natural Fibres.

Agenda item 69: Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance (*continued*)

(c) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development (*continued*) (A/C.2/61/L.4)

Draft resolution on the participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

3. **Mr. Fuks** (Argentina) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/61/L.4, which was aimed at enhancing the establishment of volunteer networks with a view to combating hunger and poverty within the context of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and preventing and mitigating the damage created by emergency situations and disasters. It also advocated the establishment of mechanisms facilitating local management of risk situations and the development of regional networks that could respond rapidly and effectively to emergency situations and disasters.

Agenda item 50: Information and communication technologies for development (A/61/94 and Add.1, A/61/165 and A/61/254)

4. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on policies of United Nations system organizations towards the use of open source software for development (A/61/94). It had not been possible for a representative of JIU to introduce the report. However, it was her understanding that JIU would be sending written comments on the addendum to the report (A/61/94/Add.1), which contained the comments of the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the report of JIU. The JIU comments would be circulated to Committee members as soon as they were received.

5. **Mr. Herman** (Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) introduced the Secretary-General's report on information and communication technologies for development (A/61/254), as well as the note by the Secretary-General on the JIU report (A/61/94/Add.1). The report described progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 57/295, by which the Assembly had requested the United Nations system to create and implement a system-wide strategy to

leverage the benefits of ICT to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the development programmes and technical cooperation activities of the United Nations organizations. In 2004, the United Nations system organizations had delivered the ICT Strategic Framework, which described the principles for moving towards a unified technology environment and identified specific initiatives in that regard. In 2005, organizations had identified eight of those initiatives as priorities, and the report described the progress made towards their implementation.

6. Resolution 57/295 stressed the need to use technology to create a seamless collaborative environment among all bodies of the United Nations system and thereby make the Organization more efficient and effective in the delivery of services to Member States. Although some progress had been made over the past year, the system faced certain obstacles. Dwindling budgets and reduced resources had become a barrier to moving forward on many fronts, and the diverse nature of the system posed challenges to the creation of a unified ICT architecture. Furthermore, while organizations might perform many of the same tasks, they did so differently, and had therefore built slightly different systems. For example, most organizations operated their own payroll systems because they needed to do so, and overcoming that obstacle would require operational and policy adjustments. Calls to harmonize and integrate ICT activities must, therefore, be viewed as calls to harmonize and integrate operational and administrative activities.

7. The report also noted the contribution made to the ICT Strategic Framework by the United Nations ICT Task Force, which had concluded its mandate in December 2005. The Task Force had been able to strengthen the linkages between ICT and internationally agreed development goals, and its efforts had contributed substantially to the development of indicators needed to measure the effects of ICT within the development context. Lastly, the global alliance for information and communication technologies and development, a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum recently launched by the Secretary-General, would provide a critical channel for magnifying the effectiveness, visibility and impact that ICT could provide.

8. The JIU report was the second of two reports on the subject of free and open source software. While the earlier report had focused on the use of such software in the secretariats, the second considered how the free and open source software movement could have a positive impact on development efforts. The report clearly demonstrated that the movement had begun to challenge old models of software use, and organizations must apply a range of criteria when selecting software for institutional use, including support, training, cost of implementation and applicability to the task at hand. In the area of development, however, there was also a need to consider the social and economic implications of the model used to develop and distribute software. In contrast to the proprietary model of software distribution, the open source models were flexible in allowing users to change, diagnose or even repair products, as necessary, and then freely distribute them.

9. That flexibility had profound implications for all economies, especially those trying to cross the digital divide. For example, acquisition costs could be very low, allowing individuals with very little disposable income to participate in the information society. Moreover, it allowed individuals and organizations in smaller economic settings to utilize tools that would not ordinarily be available to them. However, their use could also involve considerable hidden costs, like those incurred because of the need to learn and fully utilize the selected tool. At least one organization noted that the ability to actually use and understand such technology was an important factor when creating an enabling environment for the advanced use of ICTs to improve development, implying the need for an educational system and other policy actions at the government and civil society levels.

10. Organizations believed that, while the JIU report did touch on those issues, additional details would have proven valuable. Although they made other comments on the study approach used and the recommendations made, they supported all the recommendations of JIU. While they felt that several recommendations did not fully explore all the issues surrounding the use of free and open source software for development, they felt that in general JIU had established useful guidelines for Member States and the United Nations system.

11. **Ms. Bilello** (United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO)) introduced the report of the Director-General of UNESCO on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system (A/61/165), which provided a

review of system-wide activities for the period 2005-2006.

12. Nine United Nations system agencies, programmes and funds had contributed to the review of the existing coordination arrangements agreed upon at the ninth United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development held in Rome in September 2004. Among the key conclusions and recommendations proposed during the Round Table were that communications should be acknowledged as a central element in all development initiatives, that donors and development agencies should set up well-resourced communication-for-development units to implement and promote initiatives, and that training initiatives should be fostered in developing countries.

13. Since the preparation of the report, UNESCO had organized ongoing consultations to ensure that a system-wide approach to communication for development was adopted within the context of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and common country assessments. General Assembly resolution 51/172, entitled "Communication for development programmes in the United Nations system", stressed the need to support communication systems that allowed communities to express their aspirations and concerns and participate in the decision-making process that related to their own well-being. Moreover, it was recognized that the Millennium Development Goals could not be achieved without good communication and that new strategies and tools must be developed to that end.

14. The Colombo Declaration on Media, Development and Poverty Eradication, adopted in May 2006, explicitly linked poverty reduction to freedom of expression and a free, independent and pluralistic media, and stated that UNESCO, as the lead agency for freedom-of-expression issues within the United Nations system, should act as a platform for dialogue among stakeholders on those issues. Fostering free and independent media was a key aspect of efforts to build inclusive knowledge societies through the media and the promotion of ICTs, and it was an essential component of the work of UNESCO in the area of communication and information.

15. Lastly, she informed the Committee of three UNESCO programmes that supported the development of communication media: the community radio and multimedia centre programme, the public service broadcasting programme, and the international programme for the development of communication. Another current and increasingly important priority for UNESCO was its development of media assistance in post-conflict situations.

16. **Mr. Snoussi** (Tunisia) asked whether the development of ICTs was not reproducing and even deepening disparities and causing marginalization instead of promoting integration. The digital divide was the product of an unbalanced economic context in which ICTs were viewed in two different ways: as a source of exclusion because they had not brought the same benefits or had the same economic and social impact on everybody and had helped increase regional and social disparities, on the one hand, and as a strategic development instrument because they held considerable potential which should be used appropriately and adapted to specific local contexts, on the other hand.

17. For developing countries, the digital divide posed both technological and socio-economic challenges. The integration of ICTs into an international cooperation and partnership framework would kick-start the process of social and economic development. In that regard, some progress had been made, as reflected in the International Telecommunication Union's report entitled "ICT/Telecommunication development in least developed countries (LCDs)". The report noted that teledensity targets set by the Brussels Programme of Action had been met by 25 of the 50 least developed countries. Nevertheless, more sustained efforts were required to allow all countries, especially the least developed countries, to take advantage of the digital revolution and to establish a global digital partnership based on a common vision of solidarity, complementarity and co-development. It was this vision that had led to the organization of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva and Tunis, whose outcomes should be implemented in order to bridge the digital divide. His delegation welcomed the decision to hold the Internet Governance Forum from 30 October to 2 November 2006 in Athens. It also supported the ongoing initiatives in the United Nations system to develop tools to integrate ICTs into development and technical cooperation activities. The ICT Task Force was to be commended for its efforts and the Secretary-General deserved thanks for launching the Global Alliance for ICT and Development.

18. **Mr. Al Bayati** (Iraq) said that it was vital to harness ICTs for the benefit of development strategies. He consequently supported the establishment of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development as an initiative designed to promote dialogue and partnership and serve as a global forum. He also noted that the Millennium Development Goals could not be attained without good communication focused on the three areas of natural resource management, isolated and marginalized groups and research, extension and education.

19. After enduring years of war and embargo, Iraq was now affected by a rash of terrorist activities that precluded any continuity of scientific and technological advancement. The country's ICT gap was also widened by such factors as the increasing divide between rich and poor and difficulties in the private sector as a result of the worsening security and environmental conditions. Iraq looked forward to assistance from the international community in order to harness communications for development with a view to the future, including, for example, the elaboration of more effective policies based on the Millennium Development Goals and the consequent adoption of a more coordinated approach to development and poverty eradication. Iraq further aspired, inter alia, to keep pace with the rapid growth in ICTs, bridge the knowledge and information gap and integrate ICTs with development activities.

20. Access to information was a prerequisite for the achievement of many ICT objectives that in turn related to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Iraq was therefore seeking to establish a flourishing ICT industry in pursuit of those objectives. The integration of ICTs into Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) would help donor States and United Nations agencies to identify the country's needs in terms of poverty alleviation. Iraq was also working hard to eliminate gender disparity in education at all levels and set up education and literacy programmes for poor girls and women, to which end ICTs were urgently needed for vocational training and instruction programmes for out-of-school girls and girls in remote rural areas. Iraq additionally looked to the specialized agencies to facilitate access to remote-sensing technologies and communication networks that would enhance the effective monitoring of environmental dangers and resource management, as well as promote awareness of sustainable development strategies in a number of areas. In conclusion, he endorsed the call to address the needs of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the call for more generous ODA for countries which had declared their commitment to poverty alleviation and cooperation with the private sector in order to benefit from new technologies, in particular ICTs.

21. **Mr. Jenie** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the ICT Task Force had strengthened the link between ICT and the work of the United Nations in meeting the internationally agreed development goals. The Association supported the action taken to enhance knowledge sharing across the United Nations system. The interaction of many stakeholders through the Global Alliance for ICT and Development launched in 2006 could support the activities of the World Summit on the Information Society. Open source software was useful not only in enhancing economic opportunities, but also in managing information for health care and environmental protection.

22. ASEAN was striving to build a connected, vibrant and secure ASEAN Community through universal access to ICT infrastructure and services, greater cooperation on regulatory policy and strategy, and concerted efforts to achieve a more even and widespread development of ICT in the region. In September 2006, ASEAN had adopted the Brunei Action Plan, which focused on capacity-building and training programmes and called for greater engagement with its dialogue partners and cooperation with international organizations in several areas of ICT technology.

23. ASEAN member countries had agreed to establish an ICT fund with a fast-track approval mechanism to support their cooperative programmes and provide assistance for ICT pilot projects initiated by the private sector. ASEAN had several mechanisms for facilitating information exchange, including its TELMIN framework, Specialised Meteorological Centre and Earthquake Information Centre, as well as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre linking national tsunami early warning centres.

24. The Association supported the Tunis Commitment to build a development-oriented information society in which access to market information and lower transaction costs for poor

farmers and traders would transform benefits into economic growth. Comprehensive assistance to developing countries should continue, with a focus on creating infrastructure such as e-commerce, e-agriculture, e-health and e-education. The United Nations had a unique role to play in training personnel in the operation and management of modern telecommunications networks, and should also continue its work on including ICT in environmental protection, disaster response and sustainable development.

25. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) said that the UNESCO report transmitted in document A/61/165 emphasized the need for communication to focus on people, especially the poor, and called for scaling up successful examples of communication for development initiatives. Many of those programmes were being implemented in the least developed countries, where the majority of the poorest of the poor lived. The international community had made a commitment to pay particular attention to the needs of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States to ensure equitable and affordable access to ICT for their socio-economic development. That commitment had already produced some tangible initiatives, most notably the Digital Solidarity Fund, but greater efforts were needed in financing and technology transfer to bridge the global digital divide.

26. The greatest divide was between the 50 least developed countries and the rest of the world. While the number of persons with cell phones had grown substantially in the least developed countries, it paled in comparison with the numbers in the developed countries. The disparities were even greater with regard to Internet access. The least developed countries needed ICT to support poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts, but they also needed investment in other sectors such as energy and education to address the underlying constraints to the effective use of ICT by the poor. Greater investment was required in developing technologies and initiatives, such as wireless communication and the $100 laptop launched by the Secretary-General at the Tunis Summit, that took those constraints into consideration. That could be achieved in part through public-private partnerships which could, for example, help reduce the costs of ICT for the least developed countries by offering more favourable terms in licensing agreements for the use of communications gateways and proprietary software. His office had joined the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Pacific Islands Forum in the Pacific Connectivity Initiative to study the possibility of connecting small islands in the region through global satellites.

27. Trade in ICT and ICT-based goods and services had great potential for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, which suffered from their remoteness from international markets. By engaging in e-trade, those countries could reduce their traditional export costs and might even be more competitive thanks to their lower labour costs. The matter should therefore be given greater attention in implementing the Brussels Programme, the Almaty Programme and the Barbados Programme and Mauritius Strategy.

28. **Ms. Kim** Eun-jeong (Republic of Korea) said that Governments had a crucial role in harnessing the power of ICT for development by establishing norms and rules, primarily to ensure freedom of expression, the free flow of information and competition among ICT-related businesses. ICT capacity-building, amongst young people and women in particular, should be a priority in the e-strategies of developing countries. In formulating those strategies, Governments should take advantage of regional cooperation and resources. An example of such cooperation was the Asia-Pacific Centre for Information and Communication Technology set up in the Republic of Korea to train regional policymakers and experts. The United Nations itself should be a model for successful e-government by integrating new ICTs into its work. The Republic of Korea had established a robust ICT infrastructure and understood the potential of ICT for development. ICT capacity-building and knowledge sharing were therefore major goals of initiatives the country had launched to assist with development in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

29. **Mr. Gerus** (Belarus) said that Belarus had participated actively in the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and was pleased that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council had moved quickly in 2006 to begin implementing its outcome. ICT should be brought to

bear on the thorniest problems of economic growth and social progress. That could best be done through national technology strategies, capacity-building, and international partnerships. Alongside the specialized United Nations institutions, funds and programmes, developed countries had a major role to play by sharing their experience in the use of information technology. But South-South cooperation was also crucial in helping developing countries harness the potential of ICT. At the XIV Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, the President of Belarus had proposed that a unified economic information database should be created to facilitate economic contacts between the Movement's member States.

30. While undergoing a significant social and economic transformation, Belarus was helping build a global information society by developing a national computerization program known as "Electronic Belarus" and similar large-scale ICT projects. ICT, electronic media and the rapid movement of information were essential to foster civil society and socio-economic development.

31. **Mr. Adhikari** (Nepal) said that ICTs were the fundamental tools for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The digital divide posed a serious policy challenge and had further marginalized poor countries. One effective way of closing the digital divide was to ensure wider access to the benefits of ICTs. In that regard, Nepal welcomed the Global Alliance for ICT and Development launched by the Secretary-General. The international community should support poor and marginalized countries in their efforts to use ICT capabilities to spur their long-term growth and productivity. The Government of Nepal had mainstreamed ICT into its national development policies and programmes and sustainable development strategies. It emphasized the expansion of ICTs to rural areas and encouraged youth to play a role in the development of ICTs.

32. **Ms. Armanni Sequi** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that it was not possible for countries to manage a coherent disaster preparedness or response programme without giving detailed attention to the support provided by ICTs. Likewise, it was not possible in the modern world to imagine that development and poverty eradication could be accomplished without the contribution and increased use of ICTs. Consequently, the International Federation had focused on e-preparedness, making sure that technology was used to enhance communication, early warning and volunteer organization. The key steps to e-preparedness were a good understanding of the needs of the community and the support of the full community. For example, the Cameroon Red Cross had used computer technology to build its own long-term strategic plan and national policies, linking its local branches in towns and villages with its headquarters. The Namibia Red Cross was sharing knowledge to encourage behavioural change and to address health and development issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, gender-based violence and alcohol abuse. It had developed a partnership with the national organization Soul City to help distribute messages via radio, TV, print media and other means. While some positive results had been achieved, the potential of ICTs was far from being fully realized.

33. **Mr. Motter** (Inter-Parliamentary Union) said that almost every parliament in the world used ICTs for two main purposes: to be more transparent, accessible and accountable to the public and to be more effective in their parliamentary processes. However, the digital divide affected parliaments as much as it affected societies in general. To address the inequality, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Inter-Parliamentary Union had created the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technology in Parliament. The Global Centre had two principal missions: to reinforce parliaments' capacity to harness ICT tools to better fulfil their democratic functions and to strengthen their role in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the attainment of internationally agreed development goals. The Global Centre was intended to act as a catalyst and clearing house for information, research, innovation and technology and as a hub for technical assistance. The number of internationally funded projects of assistance to parliaments had increased in recent years, but the projects remained fragmented. The Global Centre aimed to develop a structured approach to development of ICTs for parliaments. Parliaments were major stakeholders in the follow-up to the World Summit, given their constitutional responsibility for adopting the appropriate legislative framework that underpinned the development of information societies. The Global Centre would encourage parliaments to keep the Summit outcomes high on their agenda, as attested by the organization of an international conference on ICT-

related legislation scheduled to take place in Rome in early 2007. ICTs must be part of the solution to help parliaments meet the many challenges they faced and to perform their constitutional functions in a transparent, accessible, accountable and effective manner.

34. **Mr. Reyes** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, while the digital revolution was a vital resource for both developed and developing countries, it had also expanded the gap between those two sets of countries. New technologies should serve as an instrument to combat poverty and spur economic, social, political and cultural development. The products of current scientific and technological advances were being monopolized and not shared collectively, resulting not so much in a knowledge society but in one where corporations converted knowledge into a marketable commodity. His Government had stressed that information technology was one means by which States and society in general could create an economic and social system where knowledge and information were fundamental sources of well-being and progress. It had therefore established mechanisms to expand access to information technologies and adopted social policies that had eliminated illiteracy. Countries should therefore adopt policies and strategies that could guarantee universal access to education and fair access to ICTs.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.